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ABSTRACT

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducted a survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students affiliated with local youth service organizations around the United States. A total of 496 youth from 32 states completed the survey fully. Over 90% reported that they sometimes or frequently hear homophobic remarks in their school, and almost all reported hearing these remarks from other students. The majority (69%) reported experiencing some form of harassment or violence, and 13.7% reported experiences of physical assault. Nearly half (two of five) did not feel safe in school, and over one third did not feel comfortable speaking to school staff about issues related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender status. (SLD)

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GLSEN's National School Climate Survey:

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER STUDENTS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL

The Survey

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) recently completed a national survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students affiliated with local youth service organizations (participating organizations of the National Youth Advocacy Coalition) in communities around the country. The survey was distributed to the staff or volunteers of the youth service organizations who in turn distributed it to their constituents. In this survey, students were asked about their school climate: overall comfort level, frequency of homophobic remarks heard, experiences with verbal, physical and sexual harassment and experience with physical violence related to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

A total of 496 lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender youth from 32 states completed the survey fully. (Participants who did not indicate their sexual orientation or who chose to write in "Other" were included in the analysis with the LGBT youth. It is possible that some of these students were not comfortable identifying themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender on the survey or that they were currently questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.)

The Findings

I. Homophobic Remarks in School

Youth were asked whether they had heard words such as "faggot," "dyke," or "queer" in their school and, if so, who made these remarks (student, faculty/staff or both). Youth were also asked how frequently they had heard homophobic remarks in their classes, the hallways, the bathroom or locker room, on school buses or on the field or in the gym: never, rarely, sometimes or frequently.

- Over 90% (91.4%) of LGBT youth reported that they sometimes or frequently hear homophobic remarks in their school (words such as "faggot," "dyke," or "queer").
- Almost all of the youth reported hearing these remarks from other students (99.4%, n=481).
- Over one-third of the youth reported hearing homophobic remarks from faculty or school staff (36.6%, n=177).
- Youth most frequently heard homophobic remarks in school hallways or in classrooms.
    - Hallways: 89.8% (n=439) of youth reported "frequently" or

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"sometimes"
    - Classrooms: 85.8% (n=417) of youth reported "frequently" or "sometimes"
- However, almost 75% of youth also reported hearing homophobic remarks in school bathrooms, in the school gym and on school buses.
- Over one-third of youth (39.2%, n=184) reported that no one ever intervened in these circumstances. Almost half of the youth (46.5%, n=218) reported that someone intervened only some of the time. Other students were more often reported to intervene than were faculty (82.4% reported intervention by students compared to 66.5% reported for faculty).

II. Harassment

Youth were asked how frequently they had been verbally, physically or sexually harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender identity: daily, weekly or monthly.

- The majority of youth reported experiencing some form of harassment or violence (69%, n=342).
    - 61.1% (n=300) reported experiences of verbal harassment.
    - 46.5% (n=224) reported experiences of sexual harassment (having suggestive comments made, being touched inappropriately, etc.).
    - 27.6% (n=134) reported experiences of physical harassment (being shoved, pushed, etc.).
    - 13.7% (n=68) reported experiences of physical assault (being beaten, punched, kicked, etc.).
- Of those student who reported verbal harassment, almost half said that they experienced it daily (45.9%, n=106).

III. Overall Comfort in School

- Nearly half (2 out of 5) of the youth did not feel safe in their school because they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (41.7%, n=191).
- Because perceptions of safety can be subjective, we wanted to examine whether there were significant differences between those students who felt safe in their school and those who did not feel safe. Indeed, fewer of the youth who felt safe in their schools reported harassment and assault due to their sexual orientation or gender identity than did the youth who reported feeling unsafe in their schools. It is important to note, however, that even though their reports of harassment and assault were lower, they were not insignificant:
    - the majority of the youth who felt safe in their schools still reported hearing homophobic remarks sometimes or frequently (86.7%)
    - despite reporting feeling safe, 46% reported verbal harassment, 36.4% reported sexual harassment; 12.1% reported physical harassment; and 6.1% reported physical assault in their school.
- Over a third of the youth did not feel comfortable speaking to school staff about LGBT issues (38.2%, n=179).

Demographics of Survey Participants

Race/Ethnicity

White	61.2% (n=285)
African-American/Black	18% (n=84)
Latino/a	7.7% (n=36)
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.4% (n=16)
Native American	1.7% (n=8)
Other	7.9% (n=37)

Gender

Male	54.5% (n=268)
Female	41.7% (n=205)
Transgender	3.9% (n=19)

Sexual Orientation

Gay	41.2% (n=201)
Lesbian	20.7% (n=101)
Bisexual	25.6% (n=125)
Unknown or Questioning	12.5% (n=61)

Age

Under 16 years old	12.7% (n=63)
16 years old	21.0% (n=104)
17 years old	28.4% (n=141)
18 years old	23.8% (n=118)
19 years old	14.1% (n=70)

Average age = 17 years

Region

Northeast	29.8% (n=148)
South	15.9% (n=79)
Midwest	23.6% (n=117)
West	26.6% (n=132)

GLSEN National School Climate Survey 9/23/99

About GLSEN

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network is the largest national organization working to end homophobia in K-12 schools. Established nationally in 1994, GLSEN now has 85 chapters and has become one of the nation's leading voices for equality and safety in the educational system.

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part of the Data Lounge Network